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OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS /

GLOBAL DISASTER ALERT AND COORDINATION SYSTEM

GDACS

VIRTUAL ON-SITE OPERATIONS COORDINATION CENTRE USER GUIDE

HTTP://OCHA.UNOG.CH/VIRTUALOSOCC/

A step by step guide to basic functions and use of the
Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre

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VIRTUAL OSOCC INTRODUCTION

The Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (VO) is a web-based information management tool developed by the Field Coordination Support Section (FCSS) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Geneva. The VO is an integral partner of the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS). The GDACS provides near real-time alerts of natural disasters around the world to facilitate response coordination, including media monitoring, map catalogues and the VO.

The VO is designed as an on-line information portal for the facilitation of information exchange between responders and affected counties before, during and after sudden-onset disasters. Access to the VO is password restricted to disaster managers from governments and disaster response organisations.

The VO has many different sections dedicated to the various information exchange requirements of the system (these sections are discussed in a later chapter of this document). Roughly speaking the requirements of the VO can be considered under two main headings (Table 1). The first of these is Operational communication and includes the information exchange requirements in the run-up to and during a disaster. The Disasters section of the VO is central in this regard.

The second requirement is that of Preparatory communication. Here one should consider the information exchange used for the building of understanding through training events, meetings and other discussions. For this type of communication the sections Trainings, Meetings, Discussions, VO Users, Statistics and Simulator are used.

| Operational communication	Preparatory communication
Information exchange requirements in the run-up to and during a disaster to ensure a coordinated response.	Information exchange used for the building of understanding among disaster managers.

Table 1: VO communication requirements

Regardless of the type of communication required. The key consideration is the need for an understanding of how to use the VO effectively to achieve the required information exchange. To this end this *User Guide* is provided to ensure users of the VO are able to benefit from all the functionalities of the VO.

This guide has been designed to be used while operating in the VO.

VIRTUAL OSOCC SECTIONS OVERVIEW

The intention of this section of the Virtual OSOCC (VO) user guide is to outline the different sections of the VO and to explain what they are about.
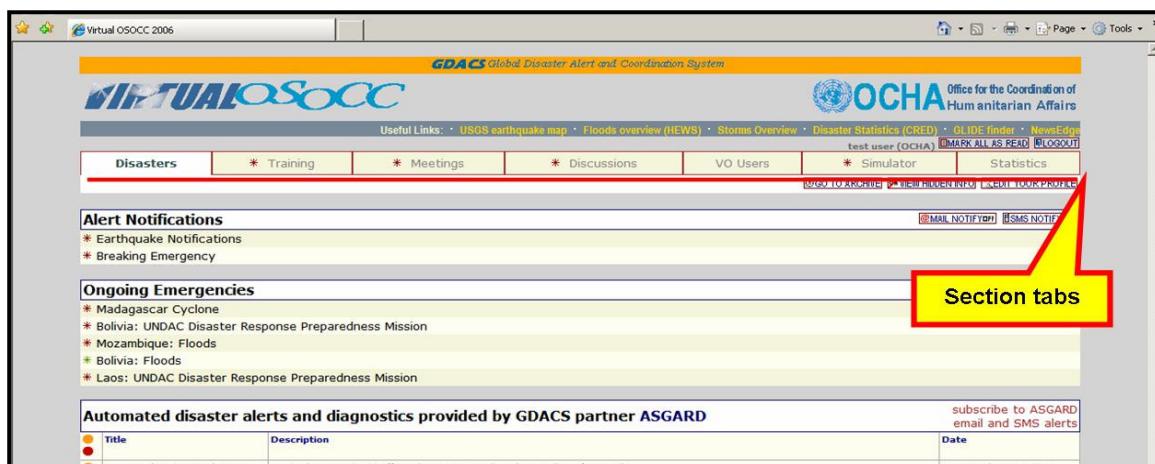
VO Main Sections
The VO is split into seven main sections. These are easily navigated to by simply clicking on the section tabs at the top of the page. These tabs are always visible no matter what part of the VO you are using. Each section is briefly described below.

An * in the section tab indicates a change in this section since you last visited it!

Disasters
All users are directed to this section first when logging into the VO. This can be seen as the operational section of the VO. Here users can see, provide and request all information needed during assessment and response to disasters.

Training
This section of the VO is dedicated to trainings. Here it is possible to find information on upcoming training events as well as to register for participation.

Meetings
Similar to the Training section. In this section it is possible to find information on upcoming meetings as well as to register for participation.

Discussions
In this section users will find various discussion topics for different groups. Here it is possible to read and provide your own comments on the different discussion topics.

VO Users
Here the user can access the data base of all the users of the VO. It is possible to search for different users as well as to see which users are currently on line.

Simulator
This section is used to conduct on-line simulation exercises to practice information exchange procedures in disasters.

Statistics
VO activity statistics can be found in this section

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# APPLYING FOR A VIRTUAL OSOCC USER ACCOUNT

The Virtual OSOCC (VO) is password protected. This means that in order to benefit from and provide information on the VO, you will first need to apply for a username and password. The following step by step procedure will help you with this.

Step 1
Logon to:
http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc/

Step 2
On the opening page click on the Request Account link below the login box.
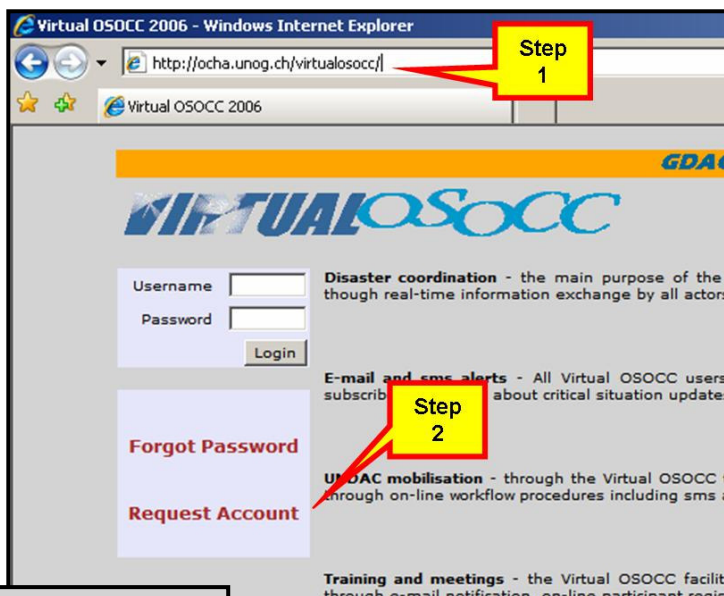
Step 3
Here you will be requested to provide you personal details and will also need to choose a username and password.

Write your chosen username and password down as you will need them in order to login once your account has been activated!

If you forget your password simply click on the Forgot Password on the opening page and use your email address to be sent a reminder.
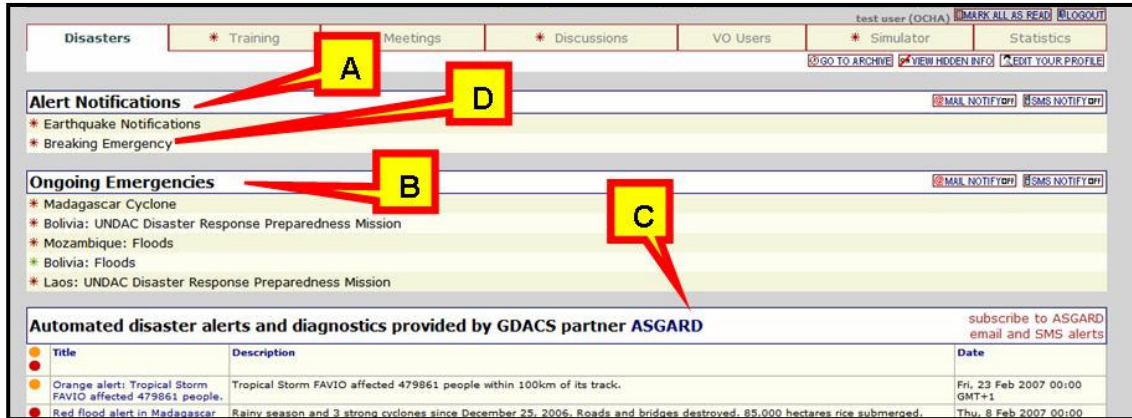
Step 4
Once you have inserted all the relevant details you will need to send them by clicking on the Submit button.

After your details have been checked by the administrator you will be sent an email to the address you provided confirming the creation of your VO account. From this point onwards you will be able to login to the VO at any time using your username and password on the opening page http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc/.

All users are encouraged to insert a Passport type photo into their profile. This can only be done once your account is active.

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DISASTERS SECTION USER GUIDE

Once a user has successful inserted their username and password the VO will always open on the 'Disasters' tab of the site. The 'Disasters' section has three main subsections. These are: Alert Notifications (A), Ongoing Emergencies (B) and the Asgard feeds (C).

Alert Notifications

Alert Notifications is dedicated to the exchange of information and alerting of disaster managers to unfolding disasters. Within the subsection one will find the **Earthquake Notification** and **Breaking Emergencies** areas. These two areas operate in much the same way, with the only exception being that **Earthquake Notifications** is restricted to Earthquake related disasters where as **Breaking Emergencies** is used for all other sudden onset disasters. For this guide we will use the Earthquake notification area to explain the functioning of both of these areas of the subsection Alert Notifications. To navigate to either of these areas simply click on the title (D).

Earthquake Notification / Breaking Emergencies

This area of the '**Disasters**' section is used for the exchange of information on unfolding earthquake disasters that have not yet been included into the **Ongoing Emergencies** (B) subsection. Here a user can find and insert the most up-to-date information about an unfolding earthquake disaster.
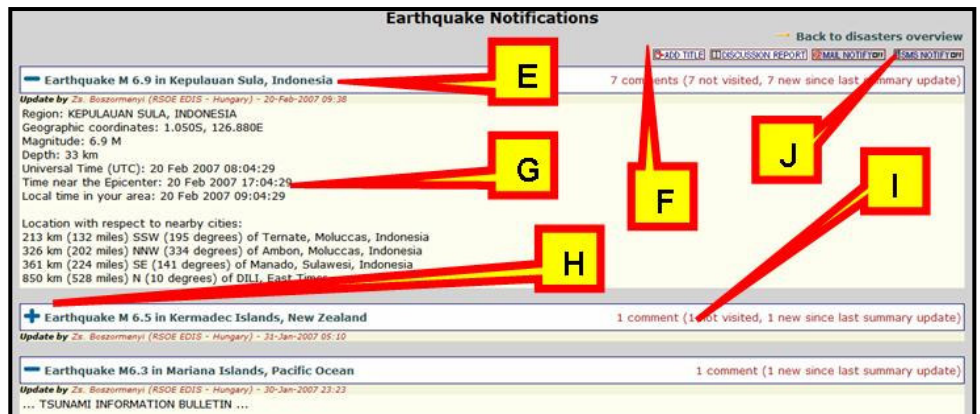

In this area all current unfolding earthquake disasters are listed (E) in the order in which they were inserted. For each event it is possible to see exactly how many new comments, not viewed by you, have been inserted since your last visit (I). It is also possible to see how many new comments have been added since the last summary update for that section was compiled.

In certain cases you may be the first user aware of an unfolding earthquake disaster. In this case, this is where you would insert the information you have. This can be done by clicking on the 'ADD TITLE' button (F). Here you will have the opportunity to insert details of an event not yet included by any other users.

Adding a new title to the section "Breaking Emergencies" should only be used in case of disasters that will possibly create significant international interest or are expected to require international assistance!

For each of the events there is also an accompanying summary provided (G). This can be hidden and revealed by clicking on the icon (H) next to each heading. To view details of the entries made by different users on an event simply click on the event heading (E) or the comments counter (I).
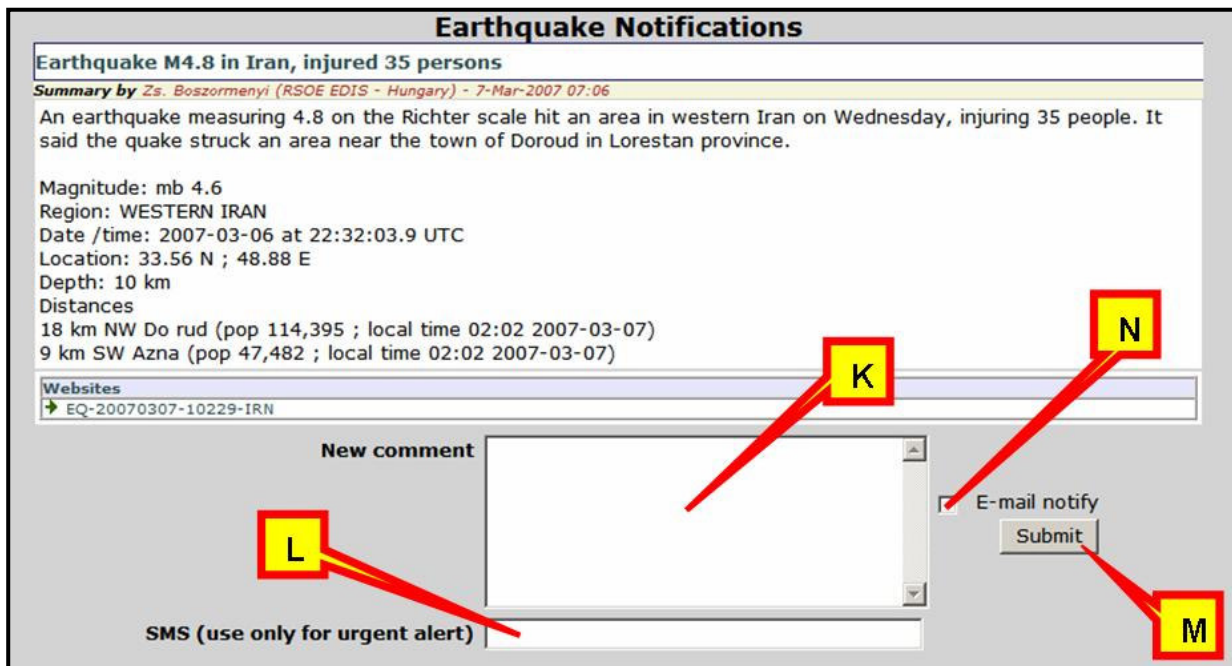
In this view it is possible to leave your comments by typing them into the New comment box (K). You can also send an SMS in the case of very urgent comments (L). Once you have typed (or pasted) your information into the comment box (K) it can be posted onto the site by using the 'Submit' button (M). Before submitting your comment, decide whether or not an email of your comments needs to be sent. If so this can be done by selecting the 'E-mail' check box (N) before submitting your comment.

Only use the SMS function (L) in the case of urgent information or requests!

For each new comment a user posts the possibility to link websites or add files to the comment is given. These functions should be used for the addition of any relevant information related to your comment. It is also possible to edit, delete or hide any comment files or website links you have inserted.

Finally on this page, as well as, on the opening page, it is possible to subscribe / unsubscribe to the email and SMS notifications. This is done by simply using the on / off type buttons (J) found at the top of the page. (See page 6)

Ongoing emergencies

If the magnitude of a disaster escalates significantly it will be moved by a VO moderator and given its own dedicated area under the Ongoing Emergencies Sub section (B).

To access all the detailed information related to an Ongoing Emergency click on the relevant heading from the list under the Ongoing Emergencies title (B).(See page 6) Here you will be directed to the dedicated page for this disaster. On this page you will find a host of headings. These headings can be considered as one of two types. The first of these are the six standard headings that will always be found at the bottom of the page. They are <u>International relief teams</u>, <u>Relief items</u>, <u>Maps provided by UNOSAT</u>, <u>Customised map requests</u>, <u>Latest Reports on Relief Web</u>, and <u>Latest Maps on ReliefWeb</u>. Each of these headings and their use will be discussed in more details later.

The second type of headings are those created by a Moderator specifically for that disaster and are listed above the six standard headings.

Finally there will be an <u>UNDAC Mobilisation</u> heading that is always at the top of the page in the case of UNDAC team involvement in the Ongoing emergency.

<u>Moderated headings</u>

With the exception of adding a title (F) these headings can be accessed (E)(H)(I) and added to (K)(L)(M)(N) in much the same way as explained for <u>Earthquake notification / Breaking emergencies </u>(see page 7 & 8). Typical examples of such headings included Situation, International response, Coordination, Contacts and Media reports.
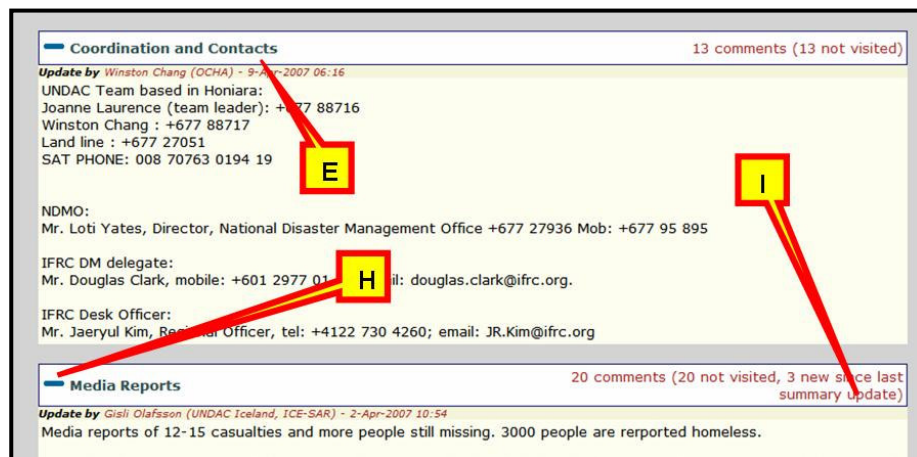
When posting information under these headings always consider the following guidelines in terms of good and bad practice.

Good Practice: (do's)	Bad Practice (don'ts)
Information should be concise and summarised making it easy for the reader to grasp the essence of the message	Pasting of (long) articles or reports that are copied from other sources
Indication of the information source and, if not obvious, indication of the reliability of the information and source	No specification of information source and quality/reliability of the information
Information should be complementary and building on previous messages provided	Posting of information that has already been posted by others
Figures, statistics and technical data should be interpreted: "What does that mean for the international disaster response community?" If the provider of the information does not have the capacity to analyse or interpret the data, another user with that capacity should do this in a follow-up comment.	Posting figures, statistics, technical data without analytical explanation.
Sharing results of own situation-analysis that lead to important decisions (e.g. in the Iran/Bam earthquake, some countries knew about the specifics of the structures in that area from a previous earthquake response and (correctly so) refrained from mobilising heavy Urban Search and Rescue teams)	Not sharing of important results of the situations analysis.
When attaching situation reports or other relevant papers, a summary of the paper should be provided as comment along with the attachment.	Attaching reports and papers without a summary of their main contents.
Only provide information that is related to the disaster and considered relevant for international coordination.	Trivial inputs of emotional or irrelevant content in the operational context (encouragement of deployed response teams, expressions of condolences, etc.)

It is also important to remember that information such as the status of your team's response or relief items you may be sending should be included within the relevant standard headings discussed below.

Standard headings

International relief teams

This section is used for international teams to register their involvement in the event. Any team wanting to include their details can do so by clicking the 'Add new relief team' (O) link. This link will then take the user to a form that can be filled in with all the relevant details of the team as known at that time. It is also important that the team selects the current status of their team. It is best to include an approximate arrival time if the status 'Deployed' or 'Mobilising' is chosen. Once all the relevant information has been added the Submit button at the bottom of the screen should be used to include your team's details into the overview.

Once your team is included you will notice the additional 'EDIT' and 'ADD FILE' buttons (P) will be present next to your team's details. Use these buttons to go back to your form to add details, change your status, or attach relevant documents about your team, such as a more detailed team profile.

User hint: It is better to submit information after a short time of working on the form and to come back to the information via the Edit functions to complete you form. In this way you are less likely to loose your work due to the system timing out before you have submitted your data.

By using the details (Q) button you will be taken to the full details of the relevant team as inserted by them for this event. Finally it is also possible to reorganise your overview of the teams by clicking on the blue column headings.

Relief items

Used for the registration, tracing and accounting of relief items, this section can be used in much the same way as the International relief teams section above. When properly used by those providing and managing relief items this can be an exceptionally useful section.

Viewing the details of items, adding new items and editing the status of previously imputed items works in the same way as the International relief teams section, discussed above. As with the previous section it is also possible here to reorganise your overview of the teams by clicking on the blue column headings.

Maps provided by UNOSAT & Customised map requests

This section shows all maps that have been made available by UNOSAT for the event. From the main page the overview provides an icon size image (R) of each of the maps available including a map title description and date and time that it was published. To get more information on the image before deciding whether or not to download it, the 'details' link (S) can be used.

To download any of the maps simply click on the Icon size image (R) on either the overview page or the details page. From here you will be taken to the UNOSAT site where the map can be downloaded as either high or low resolution image files. To request a map not already published simply make a request by following the Request map from UNOSAT' link (T). Once submitted your request will be automatically forwarded to UNOSAT and will be traceable on the 'Customised map requests' section directly below the 'Maps provided by UNOSAT' section.

ReliefWeb feeds

The final standard section within an ongoing emergency topic to be mentioned is the 'ReliefWeb' feeds. These are available for both Reports and Maps that are found on 'ReliefWeb' for the event at hand.

By clicking on any of the blue feeds one will be taken directly to the 'ReliefWeb' site for that document or map.

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